United Nations E/2018/NGO/5

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 May 2018

Original: English

2018 session
28 July 2017–27 July 2018
Agenda item 5
High-level segment

Statement submitted by Development of Humane Action Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-08601 (E) 080618

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Statement

Development of Humane Action Foundation (DHAN) has been working with disadvantaged and deprived communities, largely women, both in rural and urban contexts for more than two decades in more than 12 states (provinces) in India. This statement is about DHAN's work in enhancing the resilience and sustainable development of local societies and the key elements of the enabling support have been captured.

These marginalized communities have been dispersed/disjointed and unorganised with little knowledge and understanding about the power of collective voice and action. In fact, this is the general scenario of larger erosion of local community action of poor families and their communities.

Keeping the long-term objective of the sustainable development of deprived rural and urban communities, DHAN has embarked on the approach of building self-reliant societies with intensive enabling process and framework, founded on the concept of Self Help and the mutuality. Stitching a network of Self Help Groups of women and their federations, with each federation comprising of 5,000 to 6,000 families through participatory planning of vulnerabilities and disabilities from social, financial and economic perspectives, a string of societies has been organised in rural and urban areas (slums). This institutional building process laid the foundation for a multifaceted enabling process to engender development.

Though women are fulcrum to the institutional building process, their families are the locus for the multifaceted developmental interventions to inculcate/appreciate the importance of building resilience first at the family level. Promoting and strengthening leadership and a robust governance of federations paved the way for the local communities taking responsibilities beyond families to look at and appreciate common good and assets such as the ecosystem for improving the quality of life. In other words, an effective demand stream at the local level emerged quite conscious of its responsibilities and rights — access to basic essential services including water, shelter/sanitation, financial services etc. The enabling process included building a "glocal" outlook, making them aware of the global developmental agenda — SDGs and connecting and relating with them, and contextualizing for the local communities. DHAN did a larger people symposium in 2015 to localize SDGs among all stakeholders focusing on the primary target groups of deprived communities.

Sustainability in a large part stems from building resilience. Social capital with the institutionalised processes has contributed to the social, financial and economic inclusion of societies, which is the cornerstone of resilience. The enhanced livelihood activities with risk covers through insurance services augment the resilience of communities. Collective action of societies brought economy of scale in accessing sanitation and renewable energy (particularly solar). Most noteworthy is the keen participation of local women organisations in protecting and contributing to the effective management of the ecosystem as is now happening in a river system in Madurai. Women Self Help Group federations have been able to interface with local municipal bodies and have their voices heard in prioritising and allocation of common resources (fiscal, monetary and physical).

18-08601